MONTANA MODERN

THE MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY — MONTANA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

prepared by

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for the

Montana Historical Society
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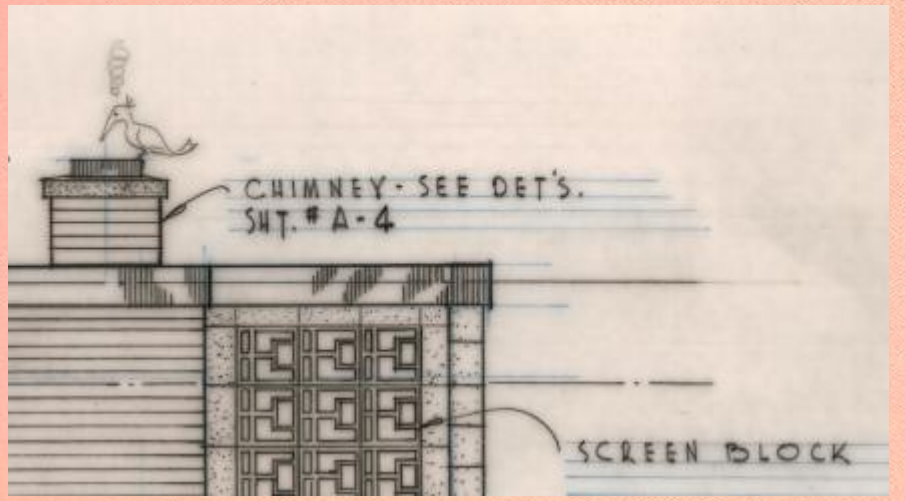


Foreword

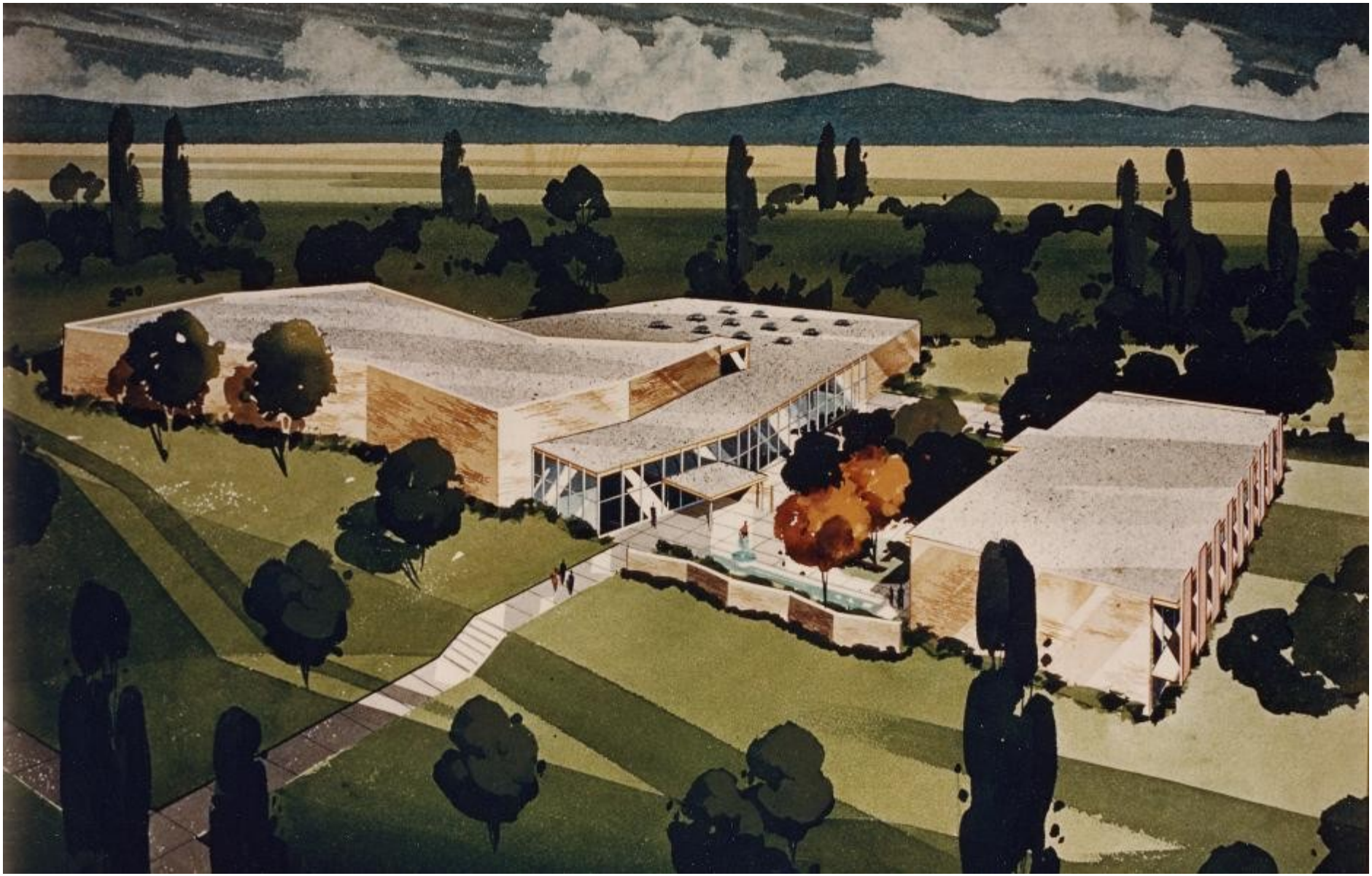
To celebrate our state's twentieth century architectural legacy, the Montana Historical Society's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) initiated projects that document, evaluate, and promote a greater appreciation of Modernist architecture in Montana. We first developed a historic context for Post-World War II Montana, when Modernist architecture made its debut here. In concert with this effort, we undertook a pilot statewide, post-World War II architectural survey that documented 50 buildings from the Modern period. In doing so, we evaluated each building for its potential National Register eligibility.

Research from these projects yielded the names of significant Montana architects of the time. As we learned more about the buildings, we felt the need to learn more about the designers behind them, through oral histories with some of the architects active in Montana during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Our understanding of Modernism in Montana is more complete thanks to the stories and original materials these people provided us. We are indebted to them for their help here, but moreover for their designs that enrich our streetscapes.

This book reflects some of what we learned through our efforts to document and better understand the architecture of our recent past.

Funding for this project provided through the National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund and Preserve America. Thanks to A&E Architects, CTA Architects, CWG Architects, Wayne Gustafson, L'Huereux Page Werner Architects, Keith Kolb, Aubrey Michaelis of swankurbia.com, and Montana State University for their generous contributions.

The Country Club Towers overlooks the south side of Great Falls. This eleven-story building's design features clean lines made up of horizontal steel awnings and vertical bands of windows. The tower is balanced by a low, sprawling garage wing. Architect, George Shanley, 1954.



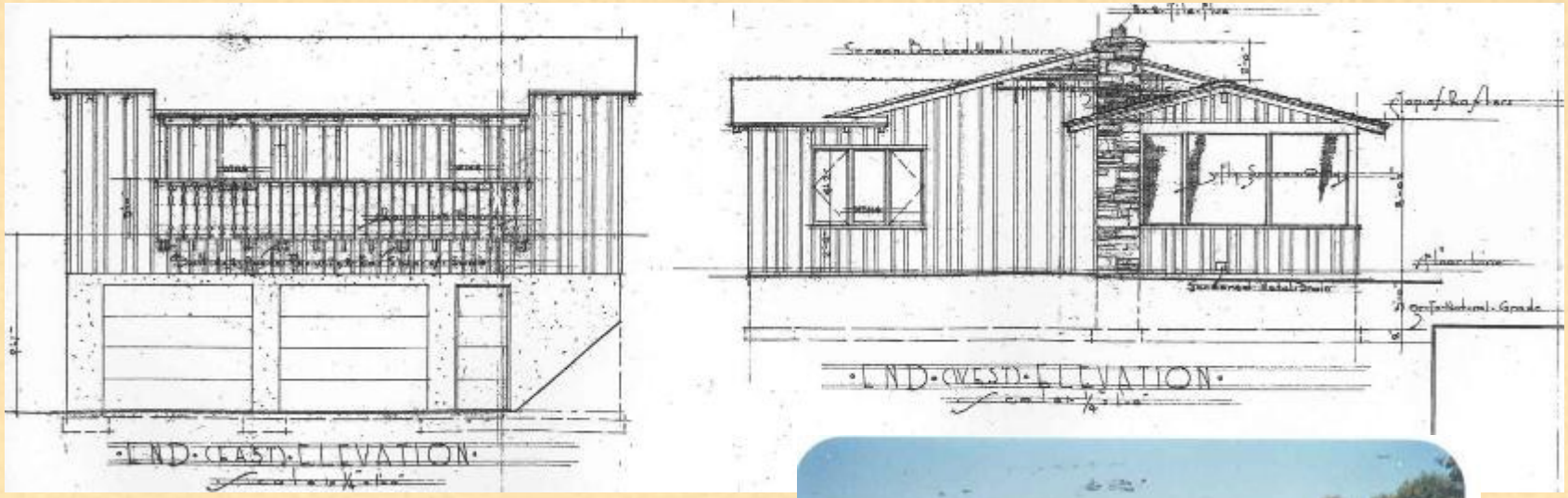
The Fine Arts Center at the University of Great Falls, with its irregular, butterfly footprint and expansive glass front greets visitors at one of the gateways to campus.
Architects, Page and Werner, 1960.

Historic Context

The U.S. witnessed its largest peacetime economic expansion in the late 1940s and 1950s, and Montana's resources fed much of the country's insatiable need for lumber, minerals, and energy. Through the early 1950s, ample rainfall and high demand for foodstuffs contributed to an improved agricultural economy, the state's education system expanded, and the commercial economy blossomed in ways not seen for decades.

The post-war years saw an influx of population to the cities – particularly university towns, places associated with military bases, and those involved in the petroleum markets. Montanans needed places to live, attend school, and conduct business. Consequently, many residences, public buildings, and storefronts date to this era. A talented pool of Montana architects versed in Modernist principles attended to these needs. Using the latest materials and technology of the era, they created exciting, sleek new buildings and adapted existing urban and rural landscapes to appear contemporary.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, Montana's economy lagged behind other states. The long distance to major markets, increased mechanization of the railroads and agribusiness, a transition to trucking from railroad shipping, and a slower mining economy all contributed to the situation. These factors, combined with the relatively small population and Montanans' generally conservative nature, limited the number of size of Modernist designs and adaptations found across the state. Still, many outstanding and significant examples exist, including curtain-walled school buildings, futuristic university facilities, avant-garde banks, churches, and car dealerships.



Left: The prosperity and forward thinking of the post-war era found its way to Montana in 1958 when the state legislature voted to fund the construction of a new Executive Residence in Helena. Sometimes called "the Ship of State," the design committee chose the middle design out of the three pictured. Architect, Chandler C. Cohagen, 1958.

Above & Right: As Montanans became more prosperous they became more mobile. As such their new houses featured attached, easily accessed, and roomy garages. Nonetheless the twin garage doors on the Western Ranch-style, Ruth Residence in Billings are secondary in the building's composition to the formal front entry porch. Architects, CTA, 1956.

Right: Modernist *roadside* architecture is commonly seen in the restaurants, motels, and auto garages that line the highway strip. The Dude Rancher Motel in Billings recalls a traditional Montana horse barn while clearly designed to accommodate more contemporary forms of transportation. Architect, CTA, 1950.

Below: McGaffick's Service Station, now Midas Muffler, in Helena is more of a departure from romanticized, modernized vernacular architecture. It makes use of "Googie" styling with its neon clock, projecting sign, and outward canted storefront windows that prevent glare. The Googie style was born of roadside architecture and came out of Los Angeles in the 1930s. Architects, Morrison-Maierle, 1951.

After World War II, America enjoyed a more robust economy and a mobile citizenry. This significantly increased visitation to the National Parks System, which was still operating at Depression Era budget levels. In 1955 Congress approved funding for the Mission 66 program intended to update parks with new infrastructure featuring the aesthetics and functionality of Modernism. Buildings such as St. Mary Visitor Center in Glacier National Park employ local materials and irregular geometry to create dramatic pavilions with expansive glass for observing the landscape. Architects, Brinkman and Lenon, Kalispell, 1965.

Form Follows Function

Modernist architecture took root in post–World War II America, fueled by a rapidly expanding national economy and a demand for new building stock following lean years of financial depression and war. Modernists reacted to America's pre-war, classical architecture by looking to the future, doing away with formal symmetry and certain architectural traditions. Instead Modernism emphasizes the efficient and rational. Pre-fabricated components made construction more economical. Open floorplans made for more open communication and movement among occupants. In general Modernist buildings are designed from the inside out; their outside *form* following their inside *function*. Views from the interior, framed by expansive window openings are just as important as a building's outward form and details.

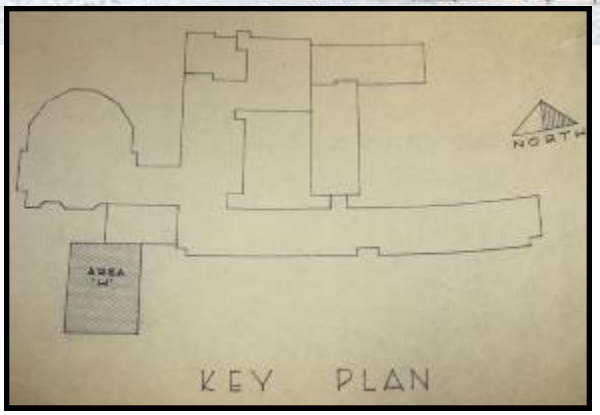
Modernist architecture grew from the German Bauhaus design philosophy of the early twentieth century. It sought to humanize the mechanization of the early 1900's and use it to create pleasingly streamlined objects and architecture. The Bauhaus school represented a merger of industry and art in which the honest aesthetic of the materials and efficient simplicity of the objects themselves took the place of applied or hand-worked ornament.

The ornamentation on Modernist buildings is often as subtle as their form is rational. Instead of elaborate and iconic decoration, the design relies on abstract ornament that comes from contrast of light and shadow, use of colors, and expression of materials, and textures. Close up, some elements of a Modernist building might appear less artistic and more factory produced: formed, enameled, and extruded. The aesthetics of the buildings are often better seen when viewed as a whole, read as tapestries of horizontal and vertical lines, or contrasting planes of light and shadow.

Ralph Cushing (standing) & Everett Terrell (seated) of CTA review their latest Modernist scheme one last time before bid. Circa 1958.

The University of Great Falls Fine Arts Building, with its expansive glazing, has an open form that allows approaching visitors to see the building's function of displaying art and hosting performances. Those inside the building have broad views across the landscaped campus. Architects, Page and Werner, 1960.

The form of the Tolstedt House in Helena accommodates residential use, but more notably allows for its occupants to experience views of the valley and hillsides through its expansive windows and from its wide open decks on four sides. Architect, Keith Kolb, 1976.



Billings West High School, with its irregular footprint, is designed to meet the functions of the school. The ten-sided gymnasium, a departure from conventional rectangular gyms, has bleachers on all four sides of the court. The auditorium flyloft rises high above the rest of the school and becomes a focal point of the building. Architects, Nordquist and Sundell in collaboration with Drake and Gustafson, 1958.

Above: The Billion Auto Dealership in Bozeman is interesting not only for its striking cylindrical form, but also for its purely functional keyhole footprint. The cylinder with its plate glass windows creates a showroom-in-the-round for passersby, while the radiating, rectangular, rear wing makes up the service bays of the dealership. Architect, Oswald Berg Jr., 1968.

Right: The *function* of the Kennedy School in Butte is to provide classroom, gymnasium and assembly space for grade school children. The school's Modern *form* mirrors the Victorian-era gable-fronted rooflines of the adjacent homes on the hillside. Architect, J.G. Link & Co., 1958.

Building Materials & Technology

Modernism combines traditional and innovative building materials for a new direction in architecture. Thin-shell concrete and wooden, glued laminated ("glulam") beams are examples of age-old materials applied in new ways that maximize the materials' structural and aesthetic potential. Each enable expressive Modern roof structures with arched rooflines and cavernous interior spaces.

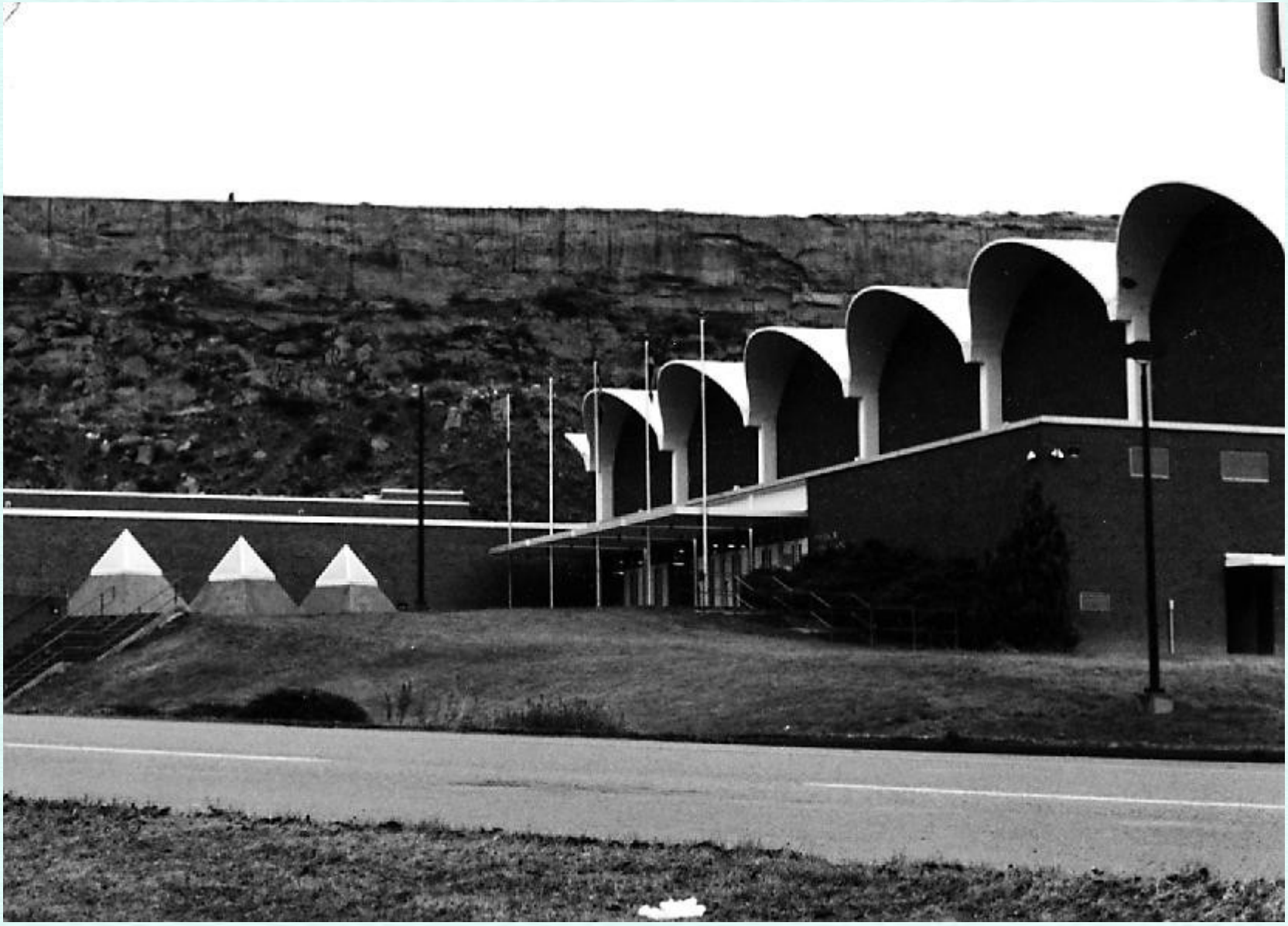
Creative use of masonry is another way to express the Modernist philosophy. Brick became available in new dimensions and was laid in non-traditional bonds to emphasize building geometry. Structural glass block, capable of carrying weight loads, provides privacy while transmitting light; pragmatic and aesthetic attributes not possible with traditional glazing. Highly polished, flat stone or terra-cotta veneer contrast with their articulated, classical ancestors and add gravity to lightweight aluminum and glass facades.

The sudden availability of formerly exotic materials reflects advances in manufacturing associated with the war-time industrial build-up. Plywood, once a fine finish material, was reborn in a utilitarian version that became widely used for structural applications. Aluminum, used in warplanes for its light weight, versatility, and resilience to the elements, also became a logical choice for the post-war building boom.

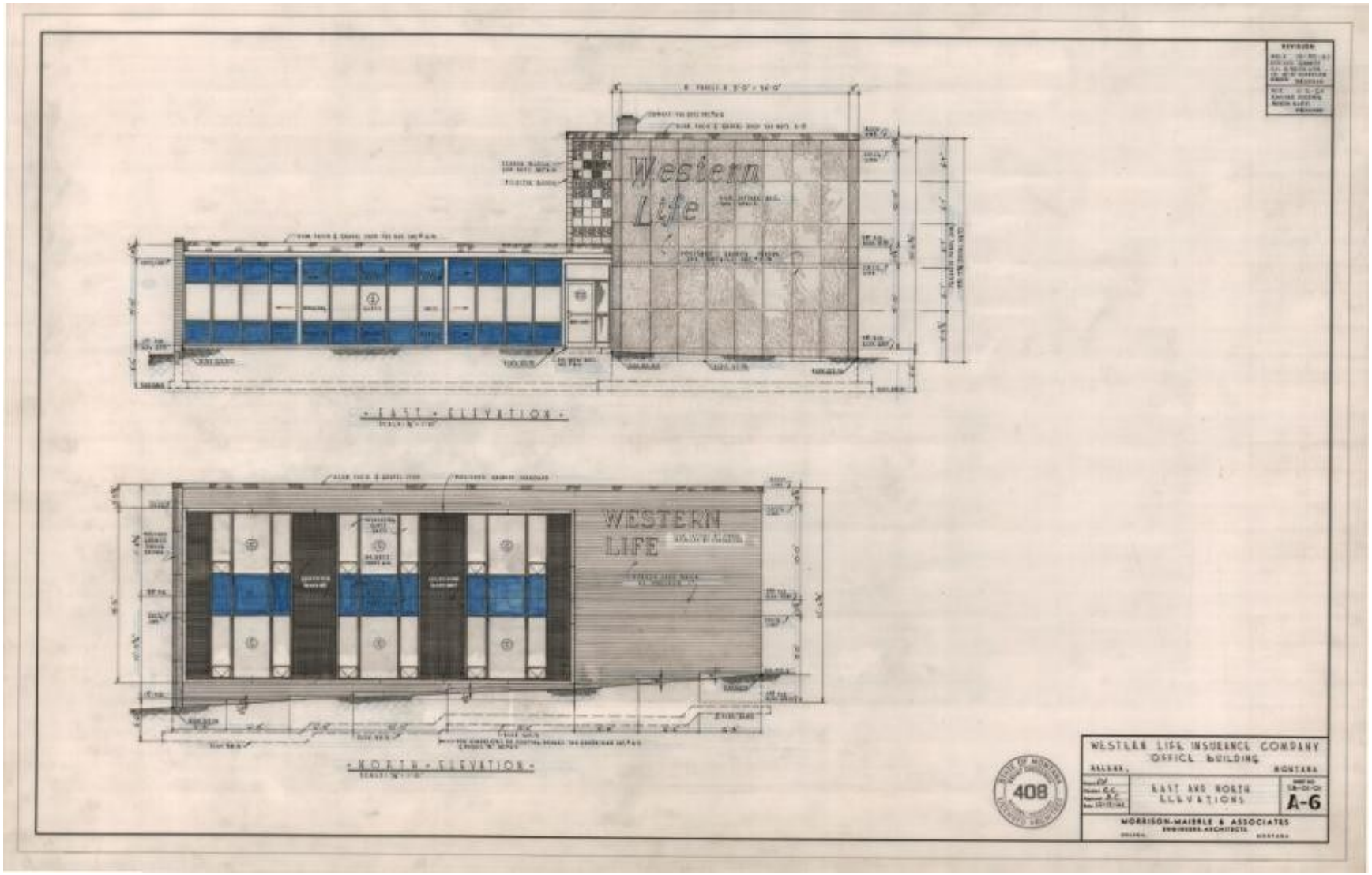
Though each of the materials and building systems common to the Modern era was pioneered in years prior, twentieth century innovation, standardization, and market demand brought them together to express the Modern aesthetic.

Above: Glued laminated beams make use of relatively small dimension lumber planks glued together to create a more massive beam. Brick Breeden Fieldhouse, MSU Bozeman. Architects, Willson and Berg, 1958.

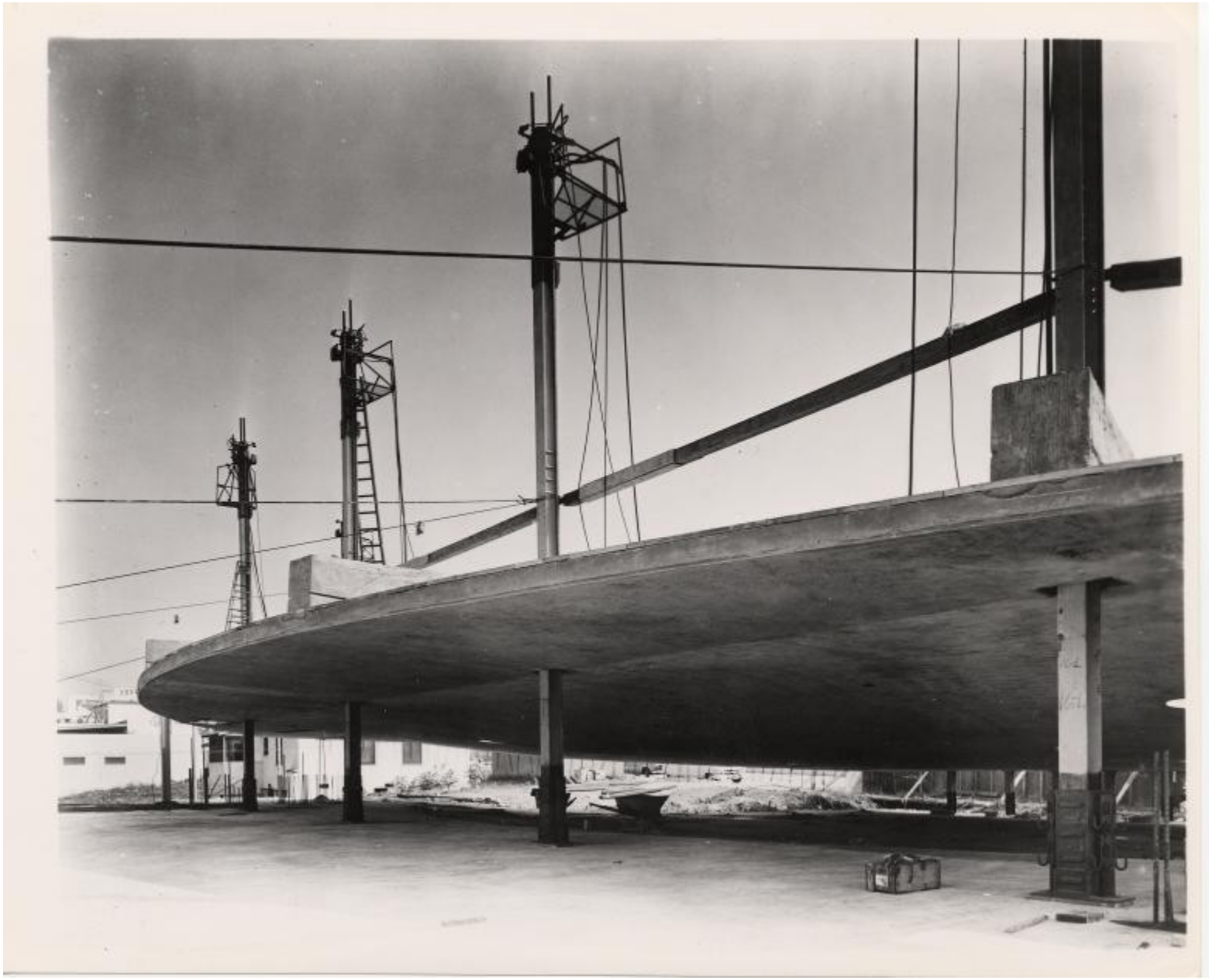
Right: Roman brick is one example of how Modernism employs traditional materials to add texture and emphasize the building's geometry. McGaffick's Filling Station, Helena. Architects, Morrison -Maierle, 1951.



Thin-shell concrete construction uses reinforced concrete cast in a self-supporting geometry that allows for large spans with minimal column support. MSU Billings, Physical Education Building. Architects, CTA, 1961.



The curtain wall construction of the Western Life Building Annex in Helena combines masonry and steel frame construction with lighter weight, non-load-bearing walls of aluminum mullions, blue enamel panels, and expansive glazing. This building also features heavier materials of brick, screenblock, marble, and tile to give it some gravity while adding variety to its finishes. Architect, Grant Crossman, Morrison-Maierle, 1961.



Lift slab construction involves casting the concrete floor and roof slabs on the ground and lifting them into place with hydraulic jacks.

Glulam beams introduce interesting geometry and warm colors to Black Otter Studios, Billings. Architects, Drake and Gustafson, 1971.

Structural glass block is capable of carrying weight loads and can be easily integrated into masonry walls. It provides privacy while transmitting light. The novel use of glass block in the walls of the McLaughlin Center punctuates an otherwise long and visually flat expanse of wall. University of Great Falls. Architects, Page and Werner, 1965.

Montana State College's Modernist Curriculum

Montana State College's (MSC) School of Architecture was established in the early 1900s as a joint program with Engineering. These two programs split in the 1940s, under Dean of Architecture Hurlburt C. Cheever. The architecture curriculum then moved away from Classicism toward Modernism, and by 1947 MSC committed to this new direction with the hiring of Keith Kolb. Kolb headed the program along with architects Hugo Eck and David Wessel. They insisted that students do their own thinking, explore new materials and construction methods, program greater open space, bigger spans, and put more glass into their designs.

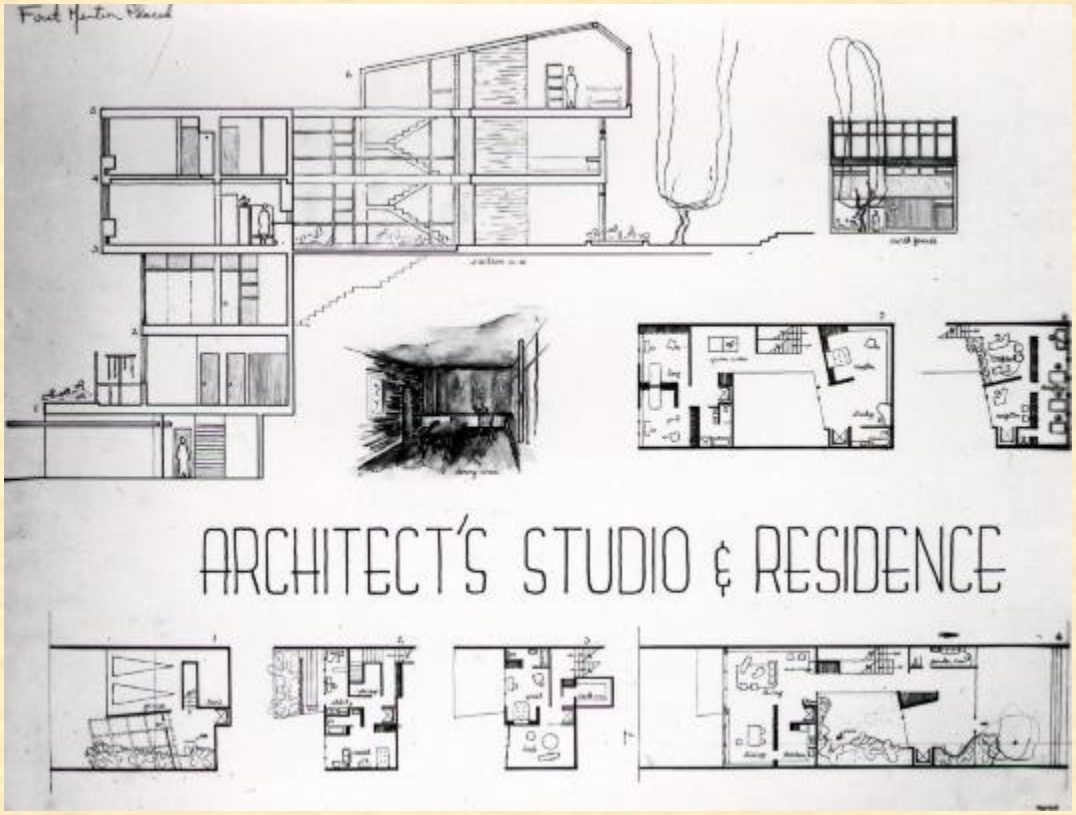
Former student Wayne Gustafson remembers those days and the rigors of MSC's program: "More than a hundred freshman were in the program; that first year was frantic. By the junior year, about 20 students were left and less than that graduated. But Kolb's enthusiasm and determination ignited a fire that kept many of the students going."

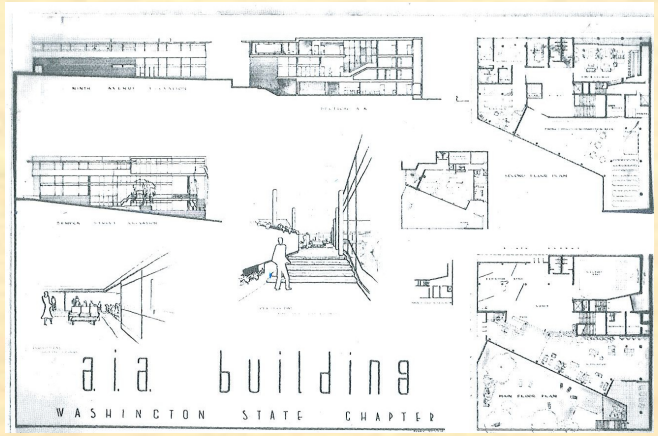
The 1949 Architectural Yearbook, *Critique*, showcases student projects and hails the Modernist curriculum as "A newly inaugurated method of teaching [that] has brought about a greater incentive for each of us to better his society." That same year MSC hosted well-known Modernist architect Richard Neutra to lecture and interact with students. For some of these students such as Leonard Sundell, the son of homesteaders, Neutra was the first architect they had met outside of the MSC faculty. The influence of MSC staff and the Neutra aesthetic come across in the pages of *Critique*, which show cutting edge residences, offices, and institutional building designs that were unprecedented in Montana.

Those who graduated nurtured Modernism in a state new to the aesthetic. They sold their clients on the efficiency, economy, and spatial experiences their designs would bring about. Today Modernism is the basis for nearly all new, architect designed buildings in Montana.

Right: "Contemporary Chair," Jack Greaves; "Architect's Studio & Residence," Emanuel Milstein; "A Rural Residence," Bob Houck; AIA Building, Mark Edson; "Sundial in Memory of a Small Child," Ken Cannon

Below: MSC Architecture students (left to right) Rus Bush, Bob Houck, Chuck Kestle, Pete Godtland, Dave Davidson.


ARCHITECT'S STUDIO & RESIDENCE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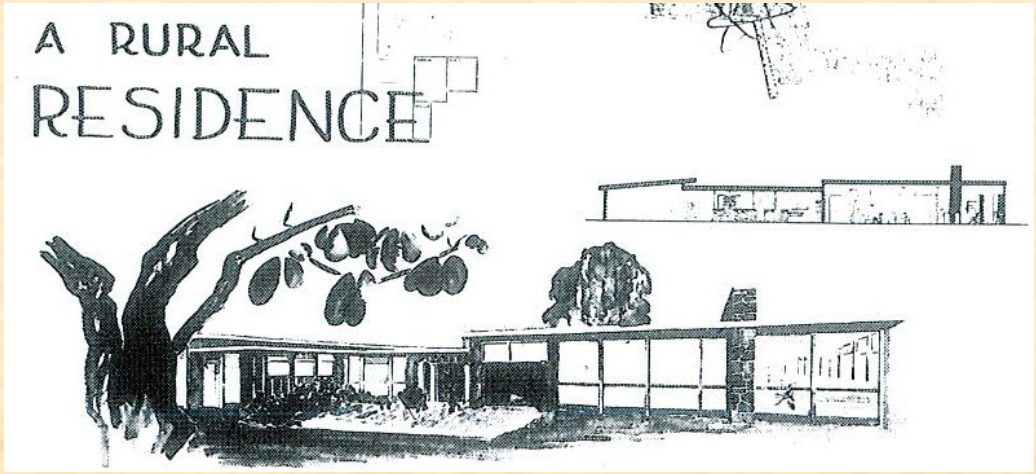

A RURAL
RESIDENCE

Keith Kolb, FAIA

Professor, '47–'49

The grandson of homesteaders on both sides of the family, Keith Kolb was born in Billings in 1922. He served in World War II and graduated from the University of Washington (UW) in 1947. He credits his background in music and the influence of Billings architect Chandler C. Cohagen for inspiring him to study architecture.

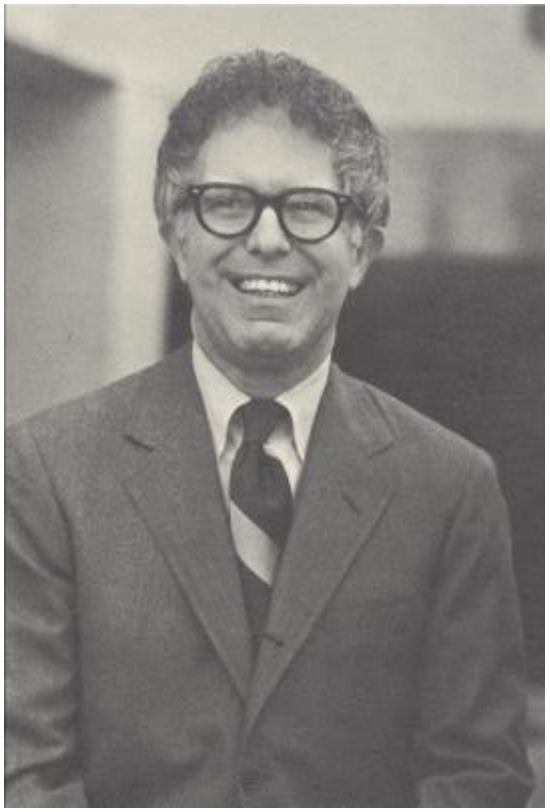
At UW, Kolb had the honor of being one of several students selected to live and study at Professor Lionel Pries' house. During his first year, Kolb claims he really didn't understand all the intricacies of the curriculum, but the constant contact with Pries and the other students in the house proved an important part of his education and helped him to develop his philosophy.

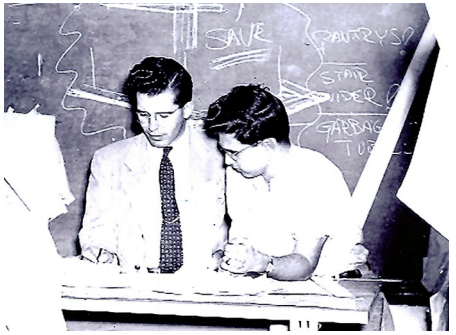
Kolb worked briefly in Seattle before MSC Dean of Architecture Bert Cheever recruited him to establish a Modernist curriculum. Committed to Modernism, Kolb thought teaching might be the best way to advance his philosophy. As the sole teacher in the program he expanded the curriculum and faculty with the goal of gaining accreditation. Kolb left MSC in 1949 when the administration refused to follow through with a commitment towards accreditation. He then earned his Master in Architecture under Bauhaus School founder Walter Gropius at Harvard, and eventually worked for Gropius from 1950 to 1952. He returned to UW, where he taught architecture for 38 years.

Kolb acknowledges he developed a reputation for being a hard taskmaster at MSC. His work ethic set high standards for his students and influenced a generation of Montana architects who speak of him in glowing terms. He got them excited about the possibilities of form and space, brought out the best in their design talents, and made them professional.

"Kolb just got into everybody's system and we began to realize what architecture was all about; it's for people."

— Leonard Sundell , Architect





Keith Kolb with Emanuel Milstein in the studio; 1949. Milstein went on to design the Danforth Chapel at MSU Bozeman.

Tolstedt House, Helena, 1976.

George Page & Vince Werner

Class of '48

George Page and Vince Werner formed Page & Werner in 1953. Born in Great Falls in 1925, Page attended MSC, where he earned his degree in Architecture in 1948. He worked for Angus V. McIver and Bordeleau-Pannell before joining with Werner.

Vincent S. Werner was born in Falls City, Nebraska in 1922 and attended MSC, also graduating with an Architecture degree in 1948. He worked for George H. Shanley from 1948 to 1950, and for the firm of Bordeleau-Pannell from 1950 to 1952.

Page and Werner undertook a wide variety of projects in their early years, including educational, commercial, and institutional work. Some of their most significant commissions included the Montana Rehabilitation Center, Great Falls Public Housing, and Riverview, Fairfield, and Westview Elementary Schools, in Great Falls, and Our Lady of Mercy Church in Eureka, Montana.

They won a First Design Award from the Montana chapter of the American Institute of Architects for the University of Great Falls campus, perhaps their best-known work.

Above: George Page and Vince Werner (with pipe) at their office.

Left: The Page and Werner Office Building, Great Falls, 1965.

F. Wayne Gustafson

Class of '50

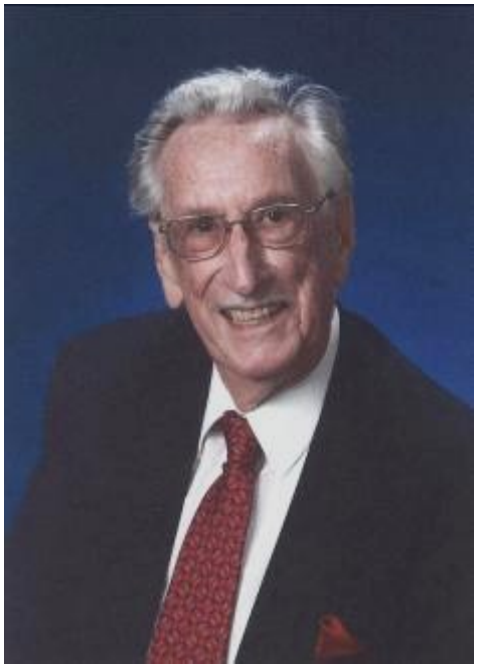
Francis Wayne Gustafson was born in northern Blaine County in 1927 where his family homesteaded. Mr. Gustafson graduated from high school in 1945, enlisted in the Navy and was sent to Japan that same year. He returned to Montana in 1946 and enrolled in the architecture engineering program at Montana State College (MSC) under the GI Bill.

Upon graduation in 1950, Mr. Gustafson relocated to Los Angeles. Unable to find work as an architect, he went to work for Boeing and enrolled in a class at the University of Southern California. He spent his evenings and weekends, however, exploring the city and photographing its Modernist structures, finding "a world of new ideas."

In 1952, Billings firm Cushing and Terrell offered Gustafson a position, where he performed his three-year internship. He passed his state examination in 1955 and formed a partnership with his friend and MSC classmate Vernon Drake: Drake and Gustafson, Architects. The practice gained a reputation for school buildings, designing about 150 of them. They also designed about 75 churches, banks, hospitals and commercial buildings.

According to Gustafson, clients sometimes resisted Modernism, but most of them were open to doing something other than repeating historical forms. The firm's mission was to provide "a modern solution to current needs" using brick, concrete, wood and other local materials that were more economical than materials shipped in. That economy helped school boards and individuals accept Modernist designs. Mr. Gustafson concludes that glass and open space were the chief characteristics of his designs.

Security Federal Savings, Billings, 1974.



Napoleon J. Campeau

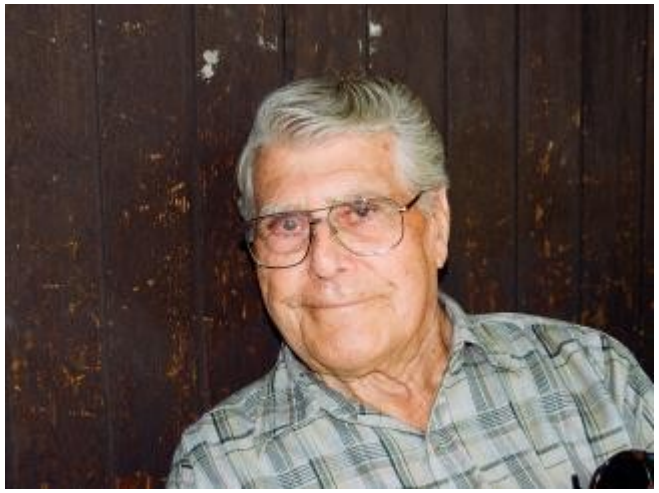
Class of '50

Born in Butte in 1925, Joe Campeau attended public schools. He served in World War II and after the war, earned a degree at MSC. He credits Dean Bert Cheever and Professor Keith Kolb with instilling in him the essential architectural qualities buildings should have: firmness, commodity, and delight.

As an architect, Campeau hoped to help create a distinct Montana architecture. He believes that Frank Lloyd Wright's work established one of the last great indigenous styles in America. Campeau's approach to establishing a Montana aesthetic is to think of a building design as analogous to a seed. It must be rooted in its place and "grow from the ground;" it must have a theme. While he doesn't believe such a distinct architecture can easily be defined, he believes that Montana's regional architecture remains elusive. "The closest may be Montana's barns," he says, "which were built sturdily with efficiency in mind for utilitarian uses. They reflect the state well."

Upon graduation, Campeau won the first AIA Graduate Prize. In 1950 he began work with Brinkman and Lenon in Kalispell. After seven years he established his own firm in Helena, and partnered with Martin Crennen. In business for himself, Campeau designed St. Ann Church in Butte and describes it as among his best work.

St. Ann Church, Butte, 1967.



Paul Schofield

Class of '50

An Anaconda, Montana native born in 1922, Paul Schofield originally planned to study engineering. After military service during World War II, however, he decided to switch to architecture. Although he considers himself a Modernist, Schofield gained more appreciation for Classicism by working for Fred Willson in Bozeman for five years, where he assisted in residential and public school projects. Later, working for Oswald Berg in Bozeman, he became a junior partner and then part owner of the practice. With Berg, Schofield made his mark in Modernism. Their practice developed a particular reputation for designing public schools, but they also did a considerable amount of commercial work.

As a modernist, Schofield worked with modern materials, especially reinforced concrete, steel, and glue laminated wood beams. He and Berg did a substantial amount of work on the MSU campus including Roskie Hall Dorms and the Brick Breeden Fieldhouse. Schofield also developed the design for the Billion Auto dealership in Bozeman. The Campus Christian Center in Bozeman is the design he is most proud of: "powerful but inviting."

Above: Roskie Hall Dorms, MSU Bozeman, 1966.

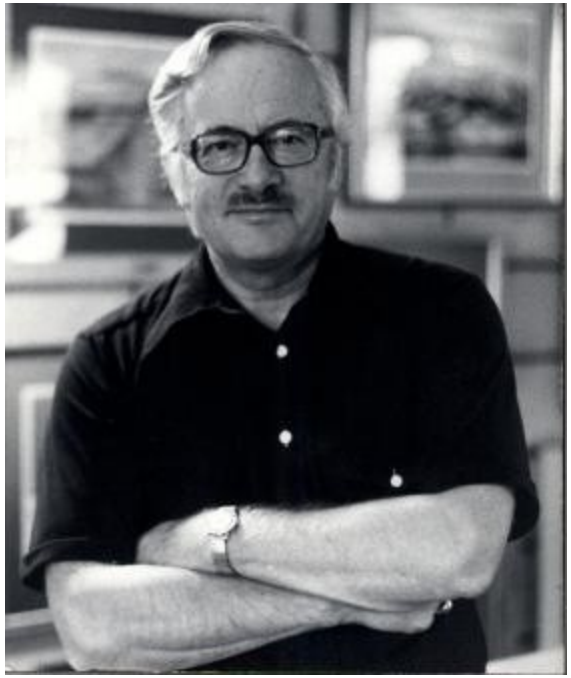
Right: Campus Christian Center, Bozeman, 1966.

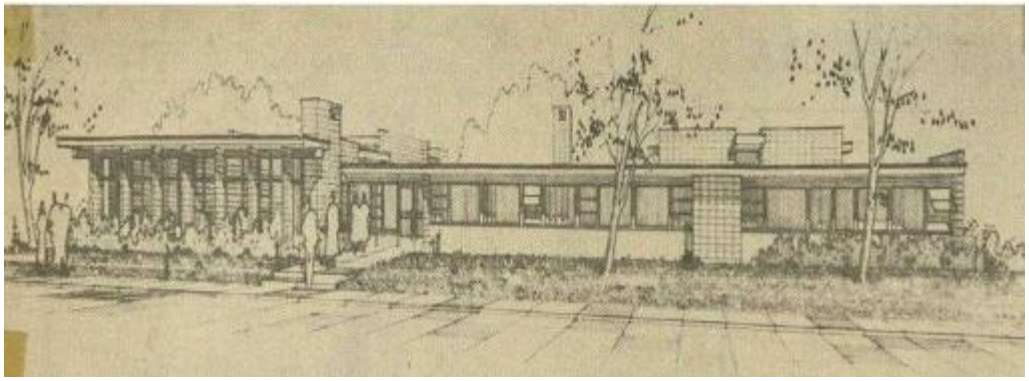
Leonard Sundell

Class of '49

Leonard Sundell came into the world in 1922 in Miles City to Swedish immigrant homesteaders. He chose architecture as his course of study at MSC because of his artistic talents that his mother nurtured in him. Although he found his education intense, Sundell thrived on the ability to create and claims he couldn't wait to get out of bed and go to school.

After graduation and gaining his license to practice architecture, Sundell formed a partnership in Billings with former classmate Ray Nordquist. The Billings YWCA and MSU Bozeman's Student Union Building, done in collaboration with architect Oswald Berg, are among his major institutional commissions. The firm specialized in residential work and designed a string of houses on McDonald Drive in Billings. Sundell describes some of his concepts as a "strange land" for his clients new to Modernism, but that they eventually warmed to them and relished the standard of living that his designs brought them. Mr. Sundell describes these designs as tied to the ground and the environment through the use of strong horizontal lines. His intent was to minimize barriers between the indoors and functional outdoor spaces, and his aesthetic, influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, involved the use of concrete block and wood.





Above and Left: YWCA, Billings, 1955.

Photo credits:

Front Cover: Photo: Frank Jay Haynes Family Photographs & Papers, #1507-000691, Burlingame Special Collections at MSU Libraries, Bozeman, MT.

Foreword: Detail, "Sheet A-7, Western Life Insurance Company Office Building," Morrison-Maierle & Associates, 1961, plans courtesy of CWG Architects Archives, Helena, MT.

Country Club Towers, Diana Painter, "Montana Post-World War II Architectural Survey," 2010, on file at MT SHPO.

Fine Arts Center, University of Great Falls, conceptual drawing courtesy of L'Heureux Page Werner Archives, Great Falls, MT..

Governor's Mansion, conceptual drawings "A", "B", and "C", Chandler Cohagen, Architect, 1956, Collection 2086, Drawing Set 303, Montana Architectural Drawings, Burlingame Special Collections at MSU Libraries, Bozeman, MT.

Ruth Residence, Architectural Drawings, CTA Architect Engineers, 1956 and photo, courtesy of Jon Axline, and on file at MT SHPO.

Dude Rancher Lodge, postcard, c. 1955, courtesy of the Dude Rancher Lodge, Billings, MT.

McGaffick's Service Station, postcard, c. 1952, courtesy of Midas Muffler, Helena, MT.

Midas Muffler, 2011, Kate Hampton, photographer, photo image on file at MT SHPO.

St. Mary Visitor Center, 2006, Casey Wollschalaeger and Lon Johnson, photographers, on file at Glacier National Park, West Glacier, MT.

Cushing and Terrell, 1958, photo courtesy of CTA Architects Engineers, Billings, MT.

University of Great Falls Fine Arts Building, interior, c. 1960, photo courtesy of L'Heureux Page Werner Archives, Great Falls, MT.

Tolstedt House, 2011, Tom Ferris, photographer, image on file at MT SHPO.

Billings West High School, Diana Painter, "Montana Post-World War II Architectural Survey," 2010, on file at MT SHPO.

Billings West High School, "Key Plan, Additions to West High School, Loners & Stroebe, 1965," on file, Facilities Department, Yellowstone School District #2, Billings, MT.

Billion Auto Dealership, Diana Painter, "Montana Post-World War II Architectural Survey," 2010, on file at MT SHPO.

Kennedy School, Diana Painter, "Montana Post-World War II Architectural Survey," 2010, on file at MT SHPO.

"Brick Breeden Field House Under Construction," University Picture Archive, #PA6.1.FH.F05-img037, Burlingame Special Collections at MSU Libraries, Bozeman, MT.

Midas Muffler, 2011, Kate Hampton, photographer, photo image on file at MT SHPO.

MSU-Billings Physical Education Building, c. 1961, photo courtesy of CTA Architects Engineers, Billings, MT.

Western Life Insurance Company Office Building, "Sheet A-6, East and North Elevations," Morrison-Maierle & Associates, 1961, courtesy of CWG Architects Archives, Helena, MT.

Lift Slab Construction, photo courtesy of L'Heureux Page Werner Archives, Great Falls, MT.

Black Otter Studios, c. 1982, photo courtesy of Wayne Gustafson, Billings, MT.

McLaughlin Center, University of Great Falls, c. 1965, photo courtesy of L'Heureux Page Werner Archives, Great Falls, MT.

Montana State University Architecture Department, *Critique*, yearbook, 1949, copy courtesy of Joe Campeau, Helena, MT.

Keith Kolb, portrait, courtesy of Keith Kolb, Seattle, WA.

"Keith Kolb with Emmanuel Milstein," photo courtesy of Keith Kolb, Seattle, WA.

Tolstedt House, 2011, Tom Ferris, photographer, image on file at MT SHPO.

"George Page and Vince Werner," "Page and Werner Office Building," photos courtesy of L'Heureux Page Werner Archives, Great Falls, MT.

F. Wayne Gustafson, portrait, 2011, Suzanne Julin, photographer, on file at MT SHPO.

Security Federal Savings, c. 1974, photo courtesy of Wayne Gustafson, Billings, MT.

Joe Campeau, portrait, courtesy of Joe Campeau, Helena, MT.

St. Ann Church, 2010, Aubrey Michaelis, photographer, www.swankurbia.com.

Paul Schofield, portrait, 2011, Suzanne Julin, photographer, on file at MT SHPO.

Roskie Hall Dorms, photo courtesy of Montana State University, Bozeman Resident Life Office.

Campus Christian Center, photo courtesy of Christus Collegium, Bozeman, MT.

Leonard Sundell, portrait, courtesy of Leonard Sundell, Billings, MT.

Billings YWCA, architectural rendering and photo, courtesy of Billings YWCA.

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